

2004

## Senior thesis work

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**Corey Jansen**  
**Senior Thesis Work**

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”

(Genesis 1:1-2, NIV)

“Nothing physical that sense experience sets before our eyes, or that necessary demonstrations prove to us, should be called in question, not to say condemned, because of biblical passages that have an apparently different meaning. Scriptural statements are not bound by rules as strict as natural events, and God is not less excellently revealed in these events than in the sacred propositions of the Bible.”

(Galileo)

“The theory of evolution is more than a hypothesis. It is indeed remarkable that this theory has been progressively accepted by researchers, following a series of discoveries in various fields of knowledge. The convergence, neither sought nor fabricated, of the results of work that was conducted independently is in itself a significant argument in favor of this theory.”

(John Paul II 1997)

“Our powers of sense and of reason are given to us by God – they are crucially involved in what it means to say that humans are made in God’s image – and to turn our back on such firmly established science is theologically unacceptable.”

(Michael Ruse)

“Hence, one is already committed to a significant allegorical reading of the early chapters of Genesis. One agrees that life came developmentally from primitive forms to the marvelous array of complexity that surrounds us today, and that such evolution is likewise revealed in the fossil record. One agrees that God could and did do all of this, just as one agrees that God could and does guide the growth of every individual from the fertilized cell to the fully grown adult form.”

(Michael Ruse)

## **Introduction**

For thousands of years, people have sought to understand not only the phenomena of the world around them but have also made attempts to gain insight into the origin of the earth and the plants and animals that inhabit it. For thousands of years man has examined his very existence on this earth and questioned how it all came to be. When

did life begin and, more importantly perhaps, how did it begin? Many great minds have spent a great deal of time and research in an attempt to understand how this earth arose from nothing. Nearly every religion known to man has some belief in how the world as we know it came to exist. Perhaps the most popular of these explanations today, especially in the United States and Europe where Christianity is the predominant religion, is the account that is given by the book of Genesis in the Bible. In the creation stories that make up a large portion of the first two books of Genesis, it is stated that in seven days, God took a formless and empty earth and from that created the sky, waters, land, animals, and vegetation. God then created man, in his own image, to tend to the animals and maintain the plants of the earth. This theory of the origin of the universe was nearly unchallenged for thousands of years. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, however, the scientific revolution began and people from all over the world began to question not only the fundamental laws which govern our solar system, but also the basic principles of life. Scientists sought diligently for clues that would give an indication of how life came to exist here on earth. Scientists and philosophers began to have difficulties with the book, particularly the account of the creation. Even today, anyone whose mind is at all open to modern facts has realized some of the perplexities which have beset readers of Genesis. Soon assumptions, which used to be taken for granted, were being flatly challenged. Physical evidence was required to prove these ideas to be true. Early scientists of these days included such men as Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo. These men questioned the structure of our universe and through experimentation and observation were able to show that in fact the earth and planets revolved around the sun. Copernicus and Galileo with their assertions showed that the earth was not the center of the universe, rather it was but

a tiny satellite that revolved around the sun. Before this time, the people as well as the Church believed all heavenly bodies to orbit the earth. Anyone who dared to question the earth's supreme place at the center of the universe was considered ungodly, immoral, and was threatened banishment from the church and society. Perhaps worse, the very intellect of these men was called into question in light of their "outrageous" claims. The scientific evidence, however, was overwhelming and these men held to their beliefs. It wasn't that they were questioning the existence of an almighty God; rather they were seeking to gain a greater understanding of the world that He created. Hundreds of years later, we know that the earth is, in fact, not the center of our solar system. Rather, it is a collection of nine planets, all revolving around the sun. This is merely one example of an instance where science was able to give us a greater understanding of the world around us. These instances do not show that the Bible was wrong. Rather, it shows that certain parts of the Bible may have been written from more of a mythological standpoint rather than a literal one. Later, geologists and paleontologists find evidence that the earth had not been made in six days but rather had been formed through an almost unimaginable amount of time. It wasn't until such scientists as Charles Darwin came along, however, that more and more people began to question the origin of species and, eventually, the origin of the universe. Not only did people begin to question beliefs about the origin of the universe and species, they began to offer theories contradictory to that found in the Creation story in Genesis. In this time, to question the belief that God created the heavens and earth in a way different from that described in Genesis was considered treason and reason for execution. More specifically, to question the fact that God created the heavens, earth, and all living things in the seven days described in Genesis was

considered absurd and immoral. The collision that took place between the new teachings and findings of scientists and the old tradition of following a literal interpretation of Genesis was significant. Multitudes of men and women reacted in panic or in defiance, supposing that if their confidence in the literal exactitude of the first verse of Genesis should go, then their whole religious faith would be gone with it. Yet the new teachings and findings had not come to spite religion but rather to stimulate it to new growth. If at first the new teachings broke up old patterns of belief, the final result was to lift men's eyes to mightier perspectives of the majestic works of God. "Whoever really believes that he is moving in God's world will go forward steadily to meet even its dismaying revelations." William Newton Clarke wrote of his own change from a strict traditionalist attitude to one that encourages a wider understanding. "I know that in my case the change has been an honest one, and am equally sure that it has been a legitimate one, which I could not have refused to make without being false to the true light....I shall hope that my experience may lead many a man to commit himself without fear to the journey that I have been led to make, assured that the good hand of his God will be upon him as he moves out into the broader country."

It is the intent of this senior thesis to show that perhaps the creation stories in the book of Genesis are meant to be taken with a mythological mindset, meaning that the stories in Genesis 1 and 2 are more symbolic, rather than a literal. Frequently in the analyses and descriptions of the creation stories in Genesis, one encounters the word myth. The word has a disturbing sound to it, for it is often assumed that a myth is only an ancient fairy tale, a story told to children that dissolves into nothing when it collides with actual fact. This is not the case. In any age our means of expression are imperfect. We

feel and observe realities that cannot be defined or described with any sort of mathematical rigidity. So the poet arises, and the artist, gifted with divine inspiration to suggest by symbolic words and forms the truths which no prose or scientific measurement can represent. It should also be noted that this paper can in no way be taken as scientific fact. Rather, it intends to examine other near-eastern accounts of origins, and show that the creation stories in Genesis were written perhaps to discount the ideas of polytheism discussed in these additional stories of creation. No one knows for certain, however, what the writers of Genesis originally intended. At best we can look at the style in which the stories were written and then speculate as to their mythological meaning. Almost all research on the book is done through careful reading and interpretation. No theory of the writers' intentions, however, can be stated with one hundred percent certainty. It is also valid to note that what science has shown us in the past few centuries is that evolution is indeed scientific fact. It is impossible to debate that evolution has occurred. Examples of evolution are seen continuously in the field of medicine where scientists are trying to create new and improved medications as bacteria become resistant to existing medications. The debate lies in by what methods does evolution occur? Does it occur through natural selection as described by Charles Darwin? Possibly through the model of punctuated equilibrium as described by Stephan Jay Gould? This paper will not examine these models of evolution. Instead it will show that the creation stories in the book of Genesis, if taken symbolically, do in fact allow for evolution to have occurred. This paper will intend, through the use of scholarly analyses and other near eastern creation accounts, to show that the creation story in Genesis should, in fact, be taken in a mythological sense. Even the great Reformist and translator,

John Calvin, came to the realization that some interpretative work was needed when examining certain books of the Old Testament. Eventually, Calvin introduced his famous “Doctrine of Accommodation” which recognized that the Bible is sometimes written in such a form as to make itself intelligible to scientifically untutored folk who would not have followed sophisticated discourse. “Moses wrote in a popular style things which, without instruction, all ordinary persons endued with common sense, are able to understand; but astronomers investigate with great labor whatever the sagacity of the human mind can comprehend. Nevertheless, this study is not to be reprobated, nor this science to be condemned, because some frantic persons are wont boldly to reject whatever is unknown to them. For astronomy is not only pleasant, but also very useful to be known: it cannot be denied that this art unfolds the admirable wisdom of God....Moses, therefore, rather adapts his discourse to common usage.” (Calvin, 1847-50)

If one allows for the creation stories to be taken with a mythological meaning, then one can allow for the process of evolution to have occurred by the hand of the almighty, supreme God. It then becomes possible for one to coordinate his or her religious beliefs with their own scholarly ones. We will begin this discussion by examining what appears to be the key theme in the first two chapters in the book of Genesis.

## **Monotheism vs. Polytheism?**

The first point of the creation story in Genesis that needs to be discussed is the central issue of polytheism versus monotheism. Conrad Hyers of Saint Olaf College states “The critical question in the creation account of Genesis 1 was polytheism versus monotheism. *That* was the burning issue of the day, not some issue which certain Americans 2500 years later in the midst of the scientific age might imagine that it was.” Part of the reason that the creation story is written in this way is because the Jewish people of the time were surrounded by many peoples who paid tribute to multiple gods. The environment in which many Jews were raised was primarily polytheistic in religion aspects. Genesis 1, however, makes the statement that there is only one God and that he alone is responsible for our creation and the creation of the world. The temptations of polytheism were everywhere and many Jews had, themselves, embraced such a belief at one time or another.

For many people living in the ancient world, the various regions of the universe were considered divine. That is, these regions were considered to be gods. People worshipped the sun, the moon, and even the stars. People in ancient times prayed to gods of fertility, light, darkness, and vegetation. Because these gods could not be seen, ancient peoples displayed extraordinary statues of precious metals in their homes and temples to represent the gods to whom they prayed. In some cultures, not only were natural forces viewed as gods, but even humans themselves. In Ancient Egypt, pharaohs were recognized as divine rulers, gods sent to earth to rule over the people. Ancient Egyptians believed their pharaohs to be immortal and that after leaving this earth, they went back to



the heavens from which they had been sent. Even kings of medieval times were considered divine in the sense that their power to rule came, specifically, from the hand of God.

In light of the historical context in which the creation stories in Genesis were written, it becomes clearer that the main purpose of the creation stories in the book of Genesis was to call the Jewish people to a monotheistic faith. In addition, the stories in Genesis discount the gods of polytheistic cultures. This can be seen as each day of creation takes on two principal categories of divinity and pantheons of the day, and declares that these are not gods at all, but rather creations of the one true God. Each of the days of creation in Genesis 1 dismisses an additional cluster of deities, arranged in cosmological and symmetrical order.

“And God said, “Let there be light;” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.” (Genesis 1:3-5 RSV version)

In these three verses, the author tells of the first day of creation. On this first day the gods of light and darkness are dismissed. These verses indicate that the light and darkness that we observe each day are not divine in nature, but instead the creation of one God.

This succession of days continues and in these days of creation, divine beings of polytheistic cultures are stripped of their divine status and are shown to be creations of God. On the second day, the gods of sky and sea. On the third day, the gods of the earth and the gods of vegetation. On the fourth day of creation, the sun, moon, and stars are

stripped of their divinity. The fifth and sixth days take away any associations with divinity from the animal kingdom. Finally, with the creation of man, all human beings from pharaohs to peasants are granted a divine likeness and an equal place in heaven. “On each day of creation another set of idols is smashed. These, O Israel, are no gods at all – even the great gods and rulers of superpowers. They are the creations of that transcendent One who is not to be confused with any piece of the furniture of the universe of creaturely habitation. The creation is good, it is very good, but it is not divine.” (Hyers, 1984)

The fundamental question at stake at the time, then, was not necessary how the universe was created, but rather to make the point that the universe was created and controlled by only one God, not multiple gods. The issue was idolatry, not science; affirmations of faith in one supreme God, not creationist or evolutionary theories of origin. Hyers makes the point that “attempting to be loyal to the Bible by turning the creation accounts into a kind of science or history is like trying to be loyal to the teachings of Jesus by arguing that the parables are actual historical events, and only reliable and trustworthy when taken literally as such.”

Now that we have addressed what is very possibly the key theme throughout the creation stories, we will now turn our attention to the use of numbers in the particular culture in which the stories were written down.

## **Numerology**

Not only is it vital to understand the context in which Genesis was written, it is also necessary to examine the literary style of the day. A related area of confusion among scholars is the supposition that the numbering of days is understood to be literal, that is, taken in an arithmetical sense. One reason for this is the fact that this is the very system we use today. "The conversion of numerology to arithmetic was essential for the rise of modern science, historiography, and mathematics. Numbers had to be neutralized, secularized, and completely stripped of any symbolic suggestion in order to be utilized." In the case of the number 13, however, negative symbolism is still associated, and the number is even skipped over in the elevators of large buildings. The use of numbers in ancient religious texts, however, was often supposed to be numerological rather than numerical. Numerological, meaning that the numbers have symbolic meaning. In ancient texts, it was often the symbolic value of numbers, not their secular value that was the basis and purpose for their use. Creationists who suggest that the seven days of creation are meant to be taken as seven 24 hour days are substituting a literal meaning for an originally intended symbolic meaning. By doing this, symbolic associations are lost and because of this the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 come into conflict with the scientific view of origins.

Seven was a basic unit of time among Western Semitic people. The Hebrews, at the time when the creation stories were recorded in Genesis, had defined the Sabbath, and it was firmly established within their society. It was important, then, for the authors of Genesis to use a seven day scheme where all work was completed by the sixth day so that

God would rest on the seventh day, the Sabbath. Another reason that the seven day structure of creation is used is because of the symbolic meaning attached to the number seven. To the Western Semitic people who were around at the time that Genesis was written, the number 7 had numerological meaning of wholeness, plenitude, and completeness. This symbolism is derived, in part, from the combination of the three major areas of the cosmos as seen vertically. These three cosmos are the heaven, the earth, and the underworld. In addition, the cosmos were divided into four quarters and directions from a horizontal standpoint. Thus, both the numbers 3 and 4 had special meaning. Both numbers were considered symbols of totality. By adding 3 and 4, one gets a more “total” number, the number 7. This number was considered to represent fullness and perfection. The number 7 is used in numerous locations in the Bible to represent this sense of completeness and perfection. For example, 7 words of praise, forgiveness 70 times 7, and, of course, the 7 day creation. Even Leviathan, the dread dragon of the abyss, was represented in Canaanite myth as having seven heads and, thus, being a complete monster. In addition to adding the numbers together, multiplying the numbers 3 and 4 also gave what was considered a “complete” number. For example, the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles. The Priestly account that is contained in Genesis 1 also makes use of the symbolism of the number 12, which, as stated, is a corresponding number for wholeness and totality. The six days of creation actually can be broken up into two sets of three days each. Generally, two types of phenomena are assigned to each day of creation. The second set of days goes a step further and fills in the details that were provided by the first set of days. The light and the darkness that were created on the first day are populated by the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth day. The firmament and

waters that were created on day two are populated by the birds and fish in day five. Finally, the earth and vegetation that was created on day three are populated by the animals of the earth and humans on the sixth day. Within this model of creation, all the major regions of the cosmos are covered in exactly six days. Each day includes two zones, equaling 12 altogether. Therefore, the symbolism of completion and fulfillment is associated with the work of creation as well as the rest from it on the seventh day. These numbers indicate a complete and perfect creation. “And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31)

The next step in our analysis of the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 is to examine the stories themselves as they are written down, noting where the stories agree and, perhaps more importantly, where they disagree.

### **The Impossibility of Literalism**

When looking at the creation stories in the book of Genesis, it is necessary to note the impossibility of literalism. “The attempt to do a literal reading of Genesis cannot, in fact, be consistently pursued. And it is not, in actual practice. Creationists are literalists up to a point, but when their particular line of interpretation runs into an insurmountable difficulty they take that particular item “metaphorically,” or concoct some fanciful explanation which is far more symbolic than the interpretation they are attempting to avoid.” (Hyers, 1983) One instance which makes a literal reading difficult is because of the imagery of days that is used in Genesis 1 when describing the creation of the universe. At the very beginning of Genesis 2, however, in verse 4 it states “These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the

Lord God made the earth and the heavens,” (Genesis 2:4, KJV) Generations is used again in Genesis 5:1 to describe the lineage of Adam. These generations are calculated in being close to 100 years per generation, which is obviously not the equivalent of single days. It is possible that both the terms “days” and “generations” cannot be taken literally.

The impossibility of literalism continues as one moves into the creation story that is told in the 2<sup>nd</sup> book of Genesis. By comparing the order of events that take place in Genesis 1, the priestly account, and the events that take place in Genesis 2, the Yahwist account, one sees that they do not agree in their orders of sequence or detail. For example, in Genesis 1 the vegetation of the earth is formed in day three, the animals of the earth on day six, and the sun, moon, and stars are formed on the fourth day. Genesis 2 does not make any reference to the creation of the sun, moon, or stars. Thus, it can be figured that they were presupposed and, therefore, came before the vegetation of the earth. In Genesis 2:7 it states “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” This is relevant because while man is not created until the sixth day in the priestly account, the Yahwist account of Genesis 2 states that man is created before the animals of the earth or the birds of the air. Then, in Genesis 2:21-23 it reads “And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof. And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man.” By examining the Yahwist account, one finds that man is created before woman and out of man, woman was created. The story differs, however, in the priestly account of

Genesis 1. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." (Genesis 1:27, KJV) One sees here that the priestly account makes the statement that man and woman were created at the same time and both on the sixth day. Also, it is valid to note that in Genesis 1 man is created "ex nihilo," or out of nothing. In Genesis 2 man is formed, as stated above, from the ground and woman is formed out of man. In Genesis 1 man is given no name while in Genesis 2, we are introduced to Adam. In ancient Hebrew, Adam is translated as "man." Adam is also considered the masculine form of the Hebrew word "adama" which is translated as ground or arable soil. God, therefore, creates "Adam" from "Adama," or man out of the ground. The creation of Eve is comparable with the myth of Dilman, which was a Sumerian myth. Sumeria predated Israel by around 1000 years. In the Sumerian myth, the god, Anky, goes into a garden and eats forbidden plants that were created by the god Ninherzag. One also notices the glaring similarity to the story of the Garden of Eden and the forbidden fruit in this myth. After Anky eats the forbidden plants, he is ruined. He is poisoned by the plants and is unable to function. Ninherzag has compassion for Anky and creates gods who are intended to fix Anky. Each of these gods takes care of a different function for Anky. One of the gods created by Ninherzag is called Ninty. Ninty is considered to be the goddess who cures broken ribs. She is also considered the "Lady who makes live." By comparison, Eve is created out of Adam's rib and is considered the mother of all the living. Adam, in a sense, gives birth to Eve from his side. This sort of procreation where a male gives birth is also seen in Greek mythology where, for example, Zeus gives birth to the goddess, Athena, from his head. By observing such glaring differences such as these and examining the comparisons with additional cosmogonies of

origin, one would think this to be an indication that literal historical sequences could not have been the concern or original intent of the authors of the book of Genesis.

In addition to the chronological dissimilarities between the priestly account and the Yahwist account, there is also variation in the treatment of water. Genesis 1 tells of a universe that began in watery chaos. In day 2 of creation God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so." (Genesis 1:6-7, KJV) Then, in verse 9, it states that God brought the waters under heaven together into one place so that dry land would appear. Then, with the dry land in place, God created the vegetation that would occupy it. It is plain to see that in Genesis 1 there is a great amount of water present and that God must separate these waters so that dry land can appear. The universe begins out of watery chaos. A different problem is indicated, however, in Genesis 2. "...in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground." (Genesis 2:4-5, KJV) In this account, there is no water at all. God must bring water to the earth before any vegetation will be able to grow. The order is reverse from that described in Genesis 1. Rather than a formless earth needing to be separated from the watery chaos, the barren earth is desperately in need of water before any vegetation can grow.

The reason for these dissimilarities most likely lies in the fact that the separate accounts were written by different authors coming from different environments in which



their life and thought began. These contrasting life-settings were agricultural-urban and pastoral-nomadic. It is likely that Genesis 1 uses imagery that would be more relevant to great civilizations arising in river basins and areas adjacent to the seas where water was an abundant resource and not as valuable to the people. The ancient people living in these regions were very aware of the great destruction that the waters of the great rivers could cause when they were flooded. For those living in the river basins and other areas with plentiful water, however, people had plenty of water and were mindful of floods and storms on the seas that led to destruction. In a single flash flood, crops would be ruined, homes destroyed, and lives lost. Water was to them the symbol of primeval chaos, and the real creation in their minds began when the dry land first appeared. In contrast, Genesis 2 draws upon the imagery more in accord with the experience of wandering shepherds and other nomads who were living in arid conditions on the plains where water was not as abundant and, therefore, considered a valuable resource. These nomads and shepherds were not fearful of a dark abyss of waters, but rather the constant presence of the desert all around them. Nomads whose life was largely bounded by the desert, moving in existence amid the vast aridity that was characteristic of these deserts, might well believe the desert, and not an abyss of waters, to be the primeval emptiness which preceded the habitable earth. What made life possible for these people of the desert was its oases. Oases were hard to find, but when they were found, men know that refreshment and continued life was there for themselves and their flocks. It is no wonder then that in Genesis 2 we see a story much different from the account in Genesis 1. Hyers states, "For the shepherd nomad in search of green pastures, and moving between scattered springs, wells, and oases, the primary problem in life (and therefore in creation)

is the absence of water. Water must be diligently sought out and is a scarce and precious commodity.” Thus, the priestly account in Genesis 1 describes a watery chaos for these people who lived in the great river basins, and a desert chaos for others who were without abundant supplies of water. This sort of relationship between environment and religion can be seen in the Islam faith as well. Islam originated in the deserts of the Middle East and Africa. These areas had very little water. In order to draw people to the Islam faith a heaven was described that was plentiful in water. People, therefore, had great incentive to follow the teaching of the religion so that they might one day gain access to this heaven in which their suffering would be eased.

“The literalist, attempting to synchronize these two accounts with each other, and then with modern science and natural history, faces an impossible task. Difficulties in these interpretations can be resolved by reading the book of Genesis as it was meant to be read. The basic literary genre of Genesis 1 is cosmological. In order to fully understand and appreciate what is being said in Genesis 1, one must learn to think cosmogonically, not scientifically or historically.”

## **Literary Style**

Cosmogony is a common literary form in the ancient world and relates to a theory or story about the origin of the universe. The idea of primordial chaos is common in many near eastern religions, including those of Babylon and ancient Egypt. Descriptions of the universe before it was formed in different creation stories include the details of a watery deep, darkness, and formlessness. For example, in ancient Egypt the origin of the universe is described in terms of four pairs of divinities that existed throughout this age

of darkness and watery chaos. Nun and Naunet were the primeval waters, Kuk and Kauket were the primeval darkness, Huh and Hauhet were the primeval formlessness, and Amun and Amanunet were considered the source of that which had now taken on a new form, the earth. The Egyptian account of the creation of the world tells of a beginning where a hill raised high into the sky from the receding waters of the Nile. Then came the appearance of the sun, air and moisture, sky and earth, and so on. “The logic of the cosmogony is that, if things now form an ordered cosmos, with each sphere clearly demarcated, there must first have been a time when they came to be what they now are out of an initial state in which this situation did not obtain – that is, chaos. And water is a natural candidate for depicting this formless beginning.”

Sumerian cosmogony also tells of the origin of the world beginning in watery chaos. Nammu, the ancient sea, gives birth to the cosmic mountain that has Ki, the earth, at its base and An, the heavens, at its peak. Then, Ki and An begat Enlil, the air and sky, and Enlil stood then between the heavens and earth.

Genesis 1 uses similar images when it describes the initial state of the universe before the earth was formed. These images can be found in other Near Eastern mythologies as well which suggests there may be some cultural significance. Because the creation of the universe created order, it is natural to think that there must have then been a time when things were not in order and water has been a common way for depicting a formless beginning.

The Enuma Elish is the Babylonian account for the origin of the earth and the universe. This epic mythology gives praise to Marduk who is the patron deity of Babylon. Marduk is the supreme being in early Mesopotamia and is celebrated for

rescuing the cosmos from Tiamat, the goddess of the watery abyss. It is from Tiamat's womb where the first gods had come. Marduk then went to work establishing the universe. Out of the two halves of the slain Tiamat, Marduk created all things. The heavens and earth; sun, moon, and stars; vegetation; animals and fish; human beings were created in this order. This sequence of creation is closely approximated with the creation sequence outlined in the book of Genesis. While the Babylonian account is polytheistic, many of its ideas are alike or very similar to those in the Book of Genesis. Genesis also gives an account of a world without form that was in the midst of watery chaos. In Genesis, it is God and only Him whose "Spirit moved upon the face of the waters."

One also may note that before each day of creation there is the phrase "And God said:" The representation that a divine word was the agent of creation is found in Babylonian, Egyptian, and Indian cosmologies. The difference is, however, that in these mythos the word uttered is often a magic word – the correct formula which, being said, released the power to bring order out of chaos. In Genesis, however, the word is the expression of God's will. "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." (Psalm 33:9, KJV)

"And God said, Let there be light: and there was light." (Genesis 1:3, KJV)

The representation that light was the first creation is possibly a somewhat subtle refinement of the Babylonian myth which states that the creation of the world was accomplished by Marduk, the sun-god. In addition to the Babylonians, many other peoples of ancient cultures thought of light as the supreme symbol of God. Besides

Marduk, the Egyptians worshipped the sun-god, Re, while other cultures had their own gods of the sun and of light. One reason for this is because light brings forth life. Even the simplest man in ancient times knew that it was the sun that brought forth the harvest after the Nile flooded its banks. After the darkness of winter it was when the sun came back that the seed sprouted and the ground brought forth crops. The fact that light was the first thing created also reflects the authors thinking that without light, there can be no order. This is why light is the first thing created. Light was also created before the sun, one of the features of the story which renders impossible all attempts to bring the stories from Genesis into line with modern scientific knowledge. Therefore, it seems likely that the author's main purpose was to set forth his conviction and that of his people that the universe had all that is in it had its origin solely in the will of God. At the same time it was likely the author's intent to give an ordered and reasonable account of the way in which the earth and the rest of the creation came into being. So that the stories would make some amount of sense to the people at the time who would be reading them, the author made sure to incorporate concepts similar to those used in other creation myths of the ancient world, particularly those of the Babylonians.

“And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.” (Genesis 1:6-7, KJV)

In the conception of the firmament as a solid substance, there is some comparison

that can be made to the Babylonian myth as well, according to which Marduk splits the slain chaos monster into two and uses one half of the carcass as a firmament and one half as the earth. The author of Genesis, however, states that the firmament was called into being by God himself, not because another god or monster was slain and split. However, in its fundamental elements this description of the creation of the firmament and waters above it and the waters beneath it, is similar to the Babylonian epic in this way: The physical picture is the same. A flat earth with mountains round its rim with the firmament resting on pillars, allowing water to come down from the heavens to the earth in the form of rain is relevant to both creation stories. But to the Hebrew mind the physical picture had a spiritual interpretation. In the Babylonian story a palace was built above the firmament for a pantheon of gods while in the firmament there were stars which were other gods whom men were intended to worship. As stated earlier, however, Genesis discounts these gods as, in fact, not gods at all but rather creations of a one true God to whom men should pay homage to.

If one examines the language used by the original authors of the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, it is found that the ancient Hebrew word for “deep” is “tehom.” Tehom is similar in sound to Tiamat, the goddess of the deep whom is defeated by Marduk. In addition, the Hebrew word “ruwach” stands for wind, spirit, or breath. Therefore, when the word ruwach is used to describe the spirit of God moving across the deep, it could be translated as wind and would be quite similar to the wind gods that are present in the Enuma Elish.

The stories contrast, however, when looking at the gods who created the universe. In the Babylonian myth, there was a great war between multiple gods. Thus, the world

was formed through blood shed and man was created to serve as a slave to the supreme god, Marduk. In Genesis, however, God created man in his own image. God gives dominion over things of the world to man. Man, therefore, is put on earth to take care of it and to give praise to God. The creation stories in Genesis describe a single God who creates the earth and man and cares for them.

While the imagery described in the opening book of Genesis has created problems for interpretation in today's world, for the people who heard the stories, for those who told the stories, and for those who recorded them in the book of Genesis, the imagery was a perfectly natural way to begin a story about the origin of the universe.

The final characteristic of the creation stories in the book of Genesis, especially the story in Genesis 1, that requires examination is the concept of preparation followed by population. This characteristic was discussed briefly earlier in this paper, but is looked at again here.

### **Preparation and Population**

Finally, to look at the creation stories in the first book of Genesis and then attempt to interpret them, one needs to consider the organization of things as the problems of darkness, water, and earth are taken care of. These problems are addressed and are fixed within the first three days of creation in the first book of Genesis. In the first day of creation, God creates light to solve the problem of darkness. In the second day of creation God takes care of the problem of water through the creation of a firmament to separate the water into the waters below and the waters beneath. The waters above most likely refer to the different forms of precipitation which fall from the sky such as rain,

snow, and hail. The waters below represent the different forms of water that are found here on earth in the lakes, streams, oceans. Finally, in the third day of creation God takes care of the problem of a formless earth by separating the earth from the darkness and the waters and then placing it in a region between the two. After these cosmos have been prepared, they are then ready to be inhabited. One can then observe a division of the priestly account into three separate parts: problem, preparation, and population. The light and darkness of day one are then populated by the sun, moon, and stars of day four. The sky and waters that were created in the second day of creation are populated by the fish and birds that were created in on the fifth day of creation. The earth and vegetation that God created on day three are then ready to be populated by land animals and human beings which were created on the sixth day. The simple diagram below shows this layout.

Problem (vs. 2)	Preparation (days 1-3)	Population (days 4-6)
Darkness	1a Creation of light b Separation from darkness	4a Creation of sun b Creation of moon, stars
Watery Abyss	2a Creation of firmament b Separation of waters above from waters below	5a Creation of birds b Creation of fish
Formless earth	3a Separation of earth from sea b Creation of vegetation	6a Creation of land animals b Creation of humans

(Hyers, 1983)

The interest of the Genesis authors when they recorded the creation stories in



Genesis 1 and 2 did not intend for these accounts to be taken in completely literal sense. Rather, the authors were more concerned with collecting and preserving the stories that had been told over and over again throughout the Jewish heritage. With that in mind, the conclusion of this thesis is that the creation stories described in Genesis 1 and 2 are meant to be taken with a mythological mindset. Evolutionary theory, therefore, does not conflict with the creation stories in Genesis. Rather, it is my thinking that God the Creator uses evolution as his own tool to create the different species that are present in our world today. If one chooses then to believe, however, that the creation stories may be mythological instead of literal, the issue then becomes where one draws the line. What stories in the Bible are meant to be taken in a literal sense and which ones are meant to be taken mythologically? In addition, if one chooses to believe that God uses evolution as his tool for speciation, one becomes confronted with the concept of extinction. Why would God create something and then let it die out? While this thesis will not spend much time analyzing this thought, it is said in Genesis 1:27 "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." Perhaps it is by man's own mismanagement that certain species throughout history have gone extinct. It's hard to say what the case is in regards to those creatures that went extinct before man. These are issues that would need to be addressed, however, in a later paper.

In closing, it is important to remember, as stated earlier, that no one can prove exactly what it was that the authors of Genesis were trying to get across to us. It is valid

to note, however, that the stories they were trying to get across were intended for and more properly understood by the people at that time and place. While they form the basis of many of our beliefs in Christianity, they weren't written with the realization that thousands of years later there would be great scientific discoveries that would teach us more about the world and about human life. Finally, all one can try and accomplish is to balance one's scholarly beliefs with one's religious beliefs. This thesis helped me to do that. By taking the creation stories in Genesis and take a closer look at them, I was able to gain a deeper appreciation for the fantastic literature that they represent. The authors describe to me, not necessarily a blueprint of how the world was created, but rather a loving God who holds power and dominion over all things.

"Truth cannot be opposed to truth, since the truths of science as well as the truths of revelation both come from God, there cannot be genuine conflict."

(Galileo)

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